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## The eleven days of Christmas: an analysis of and conductor's guide to Alfred Reed's Russian Christmas Music

Logan Vander Wiel

*University of Northern Iowa*

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## The eleven days of Christmas: an analysis of and conductor's guide to Alfred Reed's Russian Christmas Music

### Abstract

In 1944, twenty-three-year-old Alfred Reed, staff arranger and copyist for the 529th Army Air Corps Band in Atlantic City, NJ, was invited to participate in a special concert in Denver, Colorado. There, a select group of musicians from several of the leading wind bands from across the country planned to premiere works by both American and Russian composers with the goal of strengthening relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Roy Harris organized the event, programming a transcription of a movement from his sixth symphony, titled "Gettysburg," as the American work. <sup>1</sup> The Russian work was to be Sergei Prokofiev's *March op. 99*, however, Harris discovered just two weeks before rehearsals were set to begin that Alfred Reed's Air Corps band had already premiered the Prokofiev work earlier that year. So, with little time left, Harris commissioned an original work from Reed, emulating Russian musical styles, to be premiered alongside Harris' work.

Alfred Reed completed *Russian Christmas Music* in just eleven days, followed by an additional two days for him and other staff arrangers to write out the parts for rehearsals. The work was premiered on December 12, 1944, and revised to its present form in the following years. *Russian Christmas Music* catapulted Alfred Reed to the forefront of composers of original music for wind band, and many of his over 100 subsequent compositions, including *Greensleeves* (1962), *Othello* (1977), *The Hounds of Spring* (1980), and *El Camino Real* (1985) reside in the standard repertoire for the ensemble.

This purpose of this paper is to present a historical and theoretical analysis of *Russian Christmas Music* along with informed suggestions for rehearsing and interpreting the work.

**The Eleven Days of Christmas**

**An Analysis of and Conductors' Guide to  
Alfred Reed's *Russian Christmas Music***

by

Logan Vander Wiel

A Conducting Document submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Music degree at the  
University of Northern Iowa

May 2018

Graduate Committee Chair: Dr. Danny Galyen

This Study by: Logan Scott Vander Wiel

Entitled: The Eleven Days of Christmas: An Analysis of and Conductors' Guide to Alfred  
Reed's *Russian Christmas Music*

has been approved as meeting the conducting document requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Music

5/2/18

Date

Dr. Danny Galyen, Chair, Committee

5/2/18

Date

Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Committee Member

5/2/18

Date

Dr. Cayla Bellamy, Committee Member

## Introduction

In 1944, twenty-three-year-old Alfred Reed, staff arranger and copyist for the 529th Army Air Corps Band in Atlantic City, NJ, was invited to participate in a special concert in Denver, Colorado. There, a select group of musicians from several of the leading wind bands from across the country planned to premiere works by both American and Russian composers with the goal of strengthening relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Roy Harris organized the event, programming a transcription of a movement from his sixth symphony, titled "Gettysburg," as the American work.<sup>1</sup> The Russian work was to be Sergei Prokofiev's *March op. 99*, however, Harris discovered just two weeks before rehearsals were set to begin that Alfred Reed's Air Corps band had already premiered the Prokofiev work earlier that year. So, with little time left, Harris commissioned an original work from Reed, emulating Russian musical styles, to be premiered alongside Harris' work.

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Williamson, *Russian Christmas music and Alleluia! Laudamus te* by Alfred Reed: an analysis and comparison, PhD diss., University of Wyoming, 1980, 10.

of *Spring* (1980), and *El Camino Real* (1985) reside in the standard repertoire for the ensemble.<sup>2</sup>

This purpose of this paper is to present a historical and theoretical analysis of *Russian Christmas Music* along with informed suggestions for rehearsing and interpreting the work.

### **Alfred Reed the Man**

Alfred Reed was born Alfred Friedman to Viennese immigrants in New York City in early 1921. His father worked at a restaurant and maintained a healthy appetite for music which manifested itself in an extensive collection of Gramophone records to which young Alfred listened continually.<sup>3</sup> He began to play the cornet at age five, taking a few lessons at a private music academy near his family's apartment called the New York Schools of Music before getting lessons from Abraham Nussbaum who worked for the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>4</sup> By his early teens, young Alfred was playing in a local dance band where an agent urged him to change his last name to Reed since it "carried no particular religious or ethnic connotations." Alfred adopted the name, though did not legally change it until 1955.<sup>5</sup>

Reed joined the Army Air-Corps in 1942, stationed in Atlantic City and Denver. During these three years, he wrote several compositions, including *Russian Christmas*

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas M Jordan, *Alfred Reed: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> David Waltman, "Alfred Reed," in *A Composer's Insight*, ed. Timothy Salzman, vol. 1 (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music Publications, 2003), 119.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

*Music.* Following his service, he attended the Juilliard School of Music in New York under the tutelage of Vittorio Giannini. Giannini was a traditional romantic composer, which influenced Reed to continue to use traditional composition techniques throughout his career.

Reed did not graduate from Juilliard, leaving instead to pursue a career composing music for film and television. He first worked writing music for NBC before becoming the staff arranger and composer for ABC in 1948.<sup>6</sup> After leaving in 1950, Reed held several other jobs around the country before landing on the faculty of the University of Miami where he taught from 1966 until 1993. During this time, he also developed a relationship with the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra in Japan, one of the few professional wind ensembles in the world at the time.<sup>7</sup>

Alfred Reed passed away in 2005 at his home in Florida.<sup>8</sup> He was well respected as a composer in his field, especially for the works he wrote for young and developing bands. His legacy is not without its detractors, especially from composers who viewed his music as too conservative and backward-looking. Despite these critics, Reed's music remained immensely popular throughout his entire life<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Raoul F. Camus, "Reed [Friedman], Alfred," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Waltman, "Alfred Reed," in *A Composer's Insight*, ed. Salzman, 120.

<sup>8</sup> Camus, "Reed [Friedman], Alfred," *Oxford Music Online*.

<sup>9</sup> Waltman, "Alfred Reed," in *A Composer's Insight*, ed. Salzman, 119.

## The Composition Process

By the time Alfred Reed wrote *Russian Christmas Music* he had only had a few formal composition lessons with the composer Paul Yartin.<sup>10</sup> Yartin, a pupil of Camille Saint-Saëns in Paris, was well known on Broadway in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> Before joining the military Reed had only limited success as a composer, writing *Country Night* for orchestra.<sup>12</sup> He also worked making arrangements and compositions for the Ethel Smith Organ Company.

Upon joining the military band, he quickly advanced to a position where he could use his composition skills. He was employed as the staff arranger for the 529th Army Air Force Band, arranging and copying music for the performers. It was while in this group that Roy Harris put together his goodwill concert. Upon discovering that Reed's organization had already performed the work by Prokofiev, Harris had Reed write an original work for the ensemble. Reed, who had not yet written an original work for band, scored the work initially with only twenty-eight performers.<sup>13</sup> While time constraints leading up to the concert can explain some of Reed's limited scoring, the fact that many members of Reed's band were called to Europe to help fight back the German army advancing into Belgium at the time may also have played a role in the instrumentation.<sup>14</sup> The work was revised twice after its premiere: the first time in 1947

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>11</sup> Jordan, *Alfred Reed: A Bio-Bibliography*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> This work would later be renamed *Interludium* before it was published.

<sup>13</sup> Williamson, *Russian Christmas music and Alleluia! Laudamus te*, 64.

<sup>14</sup> Richard K Hansen, *The American Wind Band: A Cultural History*, (GIA Publications, Chicago, 2005), 77.



to prepare it for a composition contest at Columbia University, and the second in 1968 for a new edition for publication.

Reed wrote the work at a time where quality original music for band was difficult to find. Music publishers were reluctant to release the work, despite overwhelming praise and accolades from directors. In his book *"The Winds of Change,"* wind music expert Frank Battisti remarks that "the 'climate' of the band world in 1948 was such that the publication of lengthy and difficult pieces like *Russian Christmas Music* was financially impossible for publishers to undertake." He continues, "by 1968, many band directors were passionately seeking better music literature to perform with their bands."<sup>15</sup> This coincides with the second revision of the work for publication.

Reed scored *Russian Christmas Music* for the type of large symphonic band typical of mid-twentieth-century America. This expanded orchestration can cause performance issues, particularly with the smaller wind ensemble typical of today's bands.<sup>16</sup> For example, the work calls for six independent double reed voices: two oboes, English horn, two bassoons, and a contrabassoon. These parts are all mostly independent and often not cross-cued in other sections. It also requires two contrabass clarinets, alto clarinet, bass saxophone, and has seven independent trumpet or cornet parts.<sup>17</sup> There is also a string bass part which is essential to achieve correct balance later in the work. These parts are cued elsewhere in the modern

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Battisti, *the Winds of Change*, (Meredith Music, Galesville, MD, 2002), 30.

<sup>16</sup> Waltman, "Alfred Reed," in *A Composer's Insight*, ed. Timothy Salzman, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Reed, *Russian Christmas Music*, Score (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1969), ii. The composer also asks that the four trumpet parts all contain two players each to achieve correct balance meaning he asks for 11 players total.

edition. However, as stated before, balance and timbre can be problematic when making substitutions for other instruments.

## **ANALYSIS AND CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE**

*Russian Christmas Music* is one continuous composition with four major sections lasting fourteen to sixteen minutes. The whole work will be analyzed; then each section will have additional information given, as well as a look at conducting challenges with potential solutions. Analytical flowcharts for each section and the entire work can be referenced in the appendix.

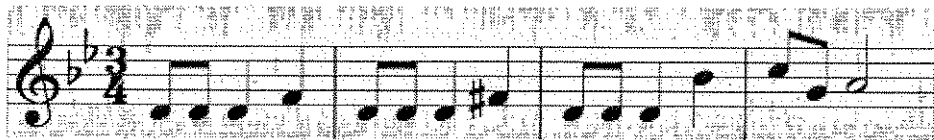
### ***Russian Christmas Music***

#### **Analysis**

*Russian Christmas Music* is a single movement work, but there are four clear sections: "Children's Carol," "Antiphonal Chant," "Village Song," and "Cathedral Chorus." The four sections share four primary themes which Reed alters and transforms to fit the character of each new segment. Table 1 in the appendix shows a broad overview of the entire piece.

Reed uses a few compositional devices throughout the work. The influence of liturgical music is evident, as many of the themes and harmonies are modally derived. He also relies heavily on incredibly weak resolutions and oscillating harmonies which, by the nature of their scarcity in western music, create a unique tonal landscape for the work. *Russian Christmas Music* is primarily in G minor but finishes in D major. The work briefly moves to other key centers, including G major and D minor. Even within the larger key centers, Reed uses unfamiliar and often non-functional harmony which rarely makes any key feel stable.

The first section is explored more deeply in Table 2 in the appendix. The work begins with a D pedal, which often would imply beginning with D as a tonic note. The clarinets quickly subvert this assumption as their part begins in G minor. The clarinets work their way through the first theme, seen in example 1, as Reed writes music using the natural minor scale. He rarely uses seventh chords, instead opting for simple triadic writing. The use of the natural minor scale, instead of the harmonic minor scale, means that both the five and seven chords are non-functional. This section, as well as many others throughout the work, feature dominant to tonic resolutions weaker than typical. He uses a minor five chord, as well as a major chord built on the flat seventh scale degree.

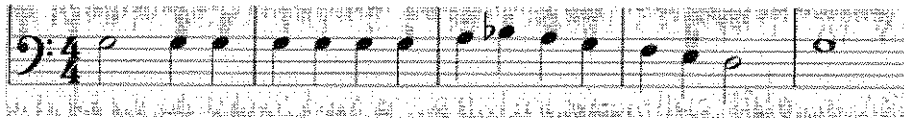


Example 1: Theme A

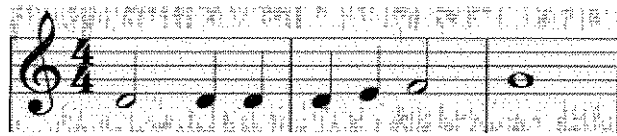
Reed also writes, beginning in measure thirteen, an oscillating chord progression which moves from G minor to the Neapolitan sixth chord of A-flat major and back. This progression has a peculiar sound which, while not functional in the strictest sense, provides tension to the section. Reed meanders back to his pedal and repeats material from the beginning of the work, but, instead of staying in G minor, resolves to G major briefly. This major tonality quickly disintegrates, leaving only the tonic G in a pedal point in the low voices.

Having a G pedal carry over to the next section allows Reed to move the work into the parallel minor key of G minor. Instead of natural minor, however, he uses G Dorian. This transition is outlined in more detail in Table 3 in the appendix. The Dorian

scale, a church mode, hearkens to the sounds of old liturgical music of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The trombones begin the section in unison, fulfilling the role of a cantor, setting up the theme shown in Example 2. This theme becomes one of the most important motives in this work and is transformed several times throughout the composition.

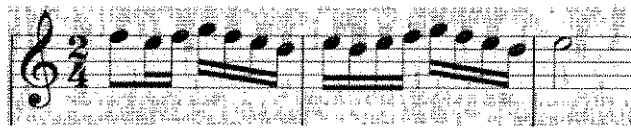


other measure. The bass drum adds needed support to the melodic line here, while the cymbal puts a needed shine on the downbeats. The second section ends with a C minor seventh chord, one of the few seventh chords in the entire work. This chord resolves weakly to F, which is played in unison by the low brass before the clarinets take the line and work back down to G as shown in Table 4 in the appendix. The English horn enters in measure 91 playing an altered version of the B theme as shown in example 4.



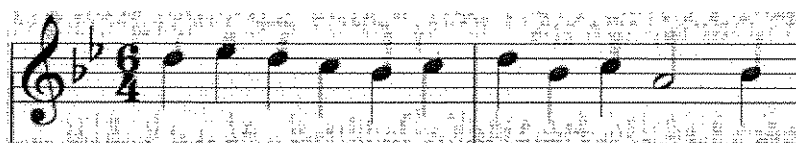
Example 4. Theme B'

Theme B' continues in G Dorian, again using a church mode. The English horn is interrupted by high woodwinds who perform an alteration of Theme C, which can be seen in Example 5.



Example 5. Theme C'

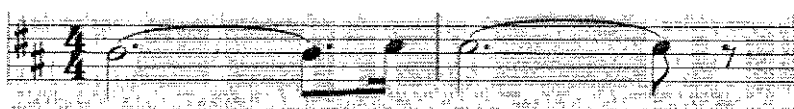
Reed uses the same effect used in the second section where he presents a melody in G Dorian. Then, when it returns, is presented a fifth above in D Dorian. Here, after the clarinets wind their way back to a pedal G, the English horn performer begins theme B' again. This creates a weak dominant to tonic effect before the music twists back to G Dorian. Measure 118 introduces a theme based on the second half of theme B, shown in Example 6 as B''.



Example 6. Theme B''

A pizzicato string bass, playing twice as fast as the other performers, accompanies this theme. This section creates a plagal feel by outlining G minor and C minor scales in the melodic line. The interest in this section comes from the shifting orchestration as well as the constant swell found in the shifting dynamics. The third section closes with another solo from the English horn which snakes its way down to a D as the horns give a plagal resolution from G minor to D major setting up the final section.

The last segment, outlined in detail in Table 5 in the appendix, begins with a drone, with small interjections from percussion. The chimes player, in measure 168, sounds a repeating pattern over a D pentatonic scale, which is out of sync with the melodic lines in the other instruments, giving the effect of random church bells in the distance. There is also a new theme which the trombones play first in measure 169 as shown in Example 7.



Example 7. Theme D

This fanfare gets passed from performer to performer above the D drone. The first harmony outside of D major comes in the form of a C major chord in measure 188 which still sits above the D drone. This chord resolves to D major as the horn, cornet, and alto saxophone players perform a figure which comes straight from the first theme



before arriving back in D major. This use of parallel chords over a tonic pedal is a common way for composers to end a work, but it is notable that Igor Stravinsky used a similar technique in the ending of his ballet *Firebird*. It is certainly possible that, in writing his finale, Alfred Reed was emulating the style of a well-known Russian composer. Consecutive plagal cadences in measure 244 set up an E major chord which acts as a secondary dominant of A, which resolves to a final, elated, unison D.

With a broad analytical overview of the work completed one can inspect the individual mechanisms at play at a deeper level within each section, as well as begin to identify conducting challenges which may arise.

### **Section One: Children's Carol**

#### **Analysis**

The first section, titled initially "Children's Carol," is a setting of a sixteenth-century Russian Christmas Carol called "Carol of the Little Russian Children" which Reed found an arrangement of by Hawley Ades in the music library at his military base.<sup>18</sup> This section is the only part of the work which Reed based on a specific piece of Russian music. The section is a three-part ABA song form with both A sections scored for clarinet choir and the B section featuring other woodwinds and brass players.

Reed often wrote featuring the clarinet choir in his works, even writing a small handout for the Leblanc corporation about the importance of a balanced clarinet sound. In this book, Reed claims that, "the clarinet choir...must be considered a

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas M Jordan, Alfred Reed: The Man Behind the Music, PhD diss., University of Miami, 1995, 32.



section in itself, apart from any of the other wind groups, and the basic tone of the entire band.”<sup>19</sup> His writing throughout even his earliest band work suggests that he considered the clarinet vital to the band even before his compositions were well known. He gradually spreads the orchestration out through the clarinets, beginning with just the soprano and alto clarinets, and adds the E-flat and bass clarinets as they approach the cadence. This melody returns at the end of the first section and again in the final section of the work.

### **Conducting Considerations**

The primary difficulty in this section comes from the extremely slow tempo. The conductor must make careful consideration as to which moments to subdivide the beat. Because three instruments with very different response times play the first note together the first beat of the work must be especially clear. Giving inactive beats, instead of *fermati*, for the first three measures can help the chime player perform his/her part correctly as well as establish the tempo for the clarinet section before their initial entrance.

The clarinet entrance in measure four is one of the most challenging points for the conductor in the work. Perhaps the most precise way to show this entrance is for the conductor to subdivide the beat for the final chime note in measure three, setting up the eighth notes at the start of measure four. Continuing the subdivision throughout the section could be necessary. The tempo risks speeding up if each eighth note isn't given. The chime player continues to play every fourth beat, out of sync with the

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<sup>19</sup> Alfred Reed, *The Balanced Clarinet Choir* (Kenosha, Wi.: G. Leblanc, 1955), 11.

clarinets, throughout these measures. These notes are laying a foundation over which the melody rests, rather than accenting specific notes in the melody, and the player should be made aware of this.

Conducting the quarter note, beginning with the anacrusis to measure 13, is the most effective way to push the tempo forward in the second segment of this section. High woodwinds should take the lead over lower voices in this part, especially when the flute players enter in measure sixteen. Because the harmonic motion in this section is largely static special care should be taken to emphasize with dynamic changes when the harmony shifts. Reed carefully and slowly increases the orchestration in the passage leading into measure 20. This means that a *crescendo* will occur without volume increases from the performers. A *crescendo* in measure 19, once all the instruments have already entered, can bring the timbral change needed for the climax. The conductor should observe that several instruments are instructed to release their holds on beat three in measure 21, while other performers begin new ones. The *fermata* at the end of this bar must be long enough for all sound apart from the drone to dissipate and establish the same feel as in the first measure one.

Measure 22 returns to the first tempo so conductors should consider subdividing the beats again until beat three of measure 25. This will help to give each beat to the players for the shifting chords. It is important for performers to observe their marked dynamics as many players begin or end notes at different dynamics than the performers who are already playing. Dividing the beat in measure 27 can be useful, but demonstrating the shape of the slowly-moving chords is most important through the end of the section. Treating the final beat of this section as a small *fermata* allows

the conductor to achieve the *crescendo* needed from the percussion section and give a clear beat to begin the next section.

## **Section 2: Antiphonal Chant**

### **Analysis**

The second section, subtitled “Antiphonal Chant,” is meant to emulate the music of the Eastern Orthodox Church which is exclusively vocal. Reed visited an Eastern Orthodox church in Globeville, Colorado which he happened to find in the yellow pages.<sup>20</sup> The pastor was gracious enough to give Reed some insights into the musical traditions of the church. Reed decided not to explicitly quote any of the orthodox music, instead electing to write music which emulated the sounds.<sup>21</sup> This section contains the two most important themes in the piece, which, as shown previously, are transformed multiple times throughout the remainder of the work. This section is divided into two sections, as shown in Table 3 in the Appendix. The first of these sections stretches from 32 to 54 and introduces the B theme. The second section, from 55 to 85, introduces and develops the C theme. The music of “Antiphonal Chant” is derived from the Dorian mode, which creates unique and interesting harmonies which give the music an older, liturgical sound.

### **Conducting Considerations**

The trombone parts are marked with the instruction *marcato ma sostenuto*, meaning accented yet sustained. The trombone section’s goal is to emulate the sound of a cantor at an Eastern Orthodox Church and should play in as vocal a manner as

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<sup>20</sup> Jordan, Alfred Reed: The Man Behind the Music, 32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

possible. Conducting this section with two beats per measure instead of four can help elongate the tone of the trombone and get the proper articulation. Giving a preparatory beat into this first measure should be simple, especially if the conductor treats the *crescendo* in the percussion as a pseudo-*fermata* in the measure before. The trombones, once they arrive at their held note, need to be instructed to make way for the woodwinds to enter. Reed marks the woodwinds *tenuto*, so they should be even smoother and more connected than the trombones. The *poco ritardando* in measures 41 and 42 can be treated much the same way as measures 30 through 31, as a pseudo-*fermata*. The trombones return with similar articulation as before, then the rest of the band comes in, again with *tenuto* markings. The next transition happens with the sudden tempo change and *ritardando* at measure 53. Here it is essential to give each of these half notes to the performers. The *ritardando* allows for a clean anacrusis beat into the contrapuntal section at measure 55.

From measure 55 through 62 it is crucial to give these cues effectively to each performer as this is one of the few sections in this work where each player's entrance is not immediately apparent. Each entrance must be brought out, but the players should make a *decrescendo* as they quickly become part of the accompaniment.

The *molto crescendo* marked in measure 62 will naturally want to push the tempo forward which means that the *poco più mosso* in measure 63 should be easy to achieve. The double bass part is eventually joined by the horns, and therefore cannot be performed merely as a tremolo. The sixteenth-note section in the woodwinds beginning in measure 67 will always tend to be too loud. However, their part must remain beneath the melody for the entire passage. Changing the dynamics from *forte*

to *mezzo piano* can help to achieve proper balance throughout this section. The bass drum in this section has several lengthy rolls, each beginning with an accent. This heavy articulation can get lost in the texture if the performer fails to stop rolling before his/her next entrance.

The final build in intensity begins with a large downbeat in measure 84, with a dead second beat before giving the next beats to the clarinets. The downbeat of measure 86 needs to be long enough for the chord to reverberate, which is facilitated by a change to a significantly slower tempo.

### **Section 3: The Village Song**

#### **Analysis**

The third section, "Village Song," features an ABA' song form. An English horn cadenza makes up the A sections while the B section features a slow chorale presented by woodwinds above double bass. As shown in Table 4 in the appendix, the first A section features a monophonic introduction by the clarinet choir. The English horn solo begins in G Dorian before being interrupted by interjections from high woodwinds. The English Horn continues, this time in D Dorian before the woodwinds again enter to prepare the music for the chorale section. The chorale, an alteration of the cantor chant from the previous section, is harmonized. This harmony is then altered to create a double bass part which moves twice as fast as the woodwinds above.

#### **Conducting Considerations**

Measure 86 begins with an accented note in the low brass on beat three which needs to have weight behind it. If the conductor shows too much weight, however, the note tends have an incredibly harsh tone. Immediately after, though, the conductor

must bring the volume down so the clarinetists can enter at *piano* in the following measure. The players should be instructed to make a *crescendo* as they descend, gaining some energy through the low F into the resolution on G in measure 90. The English horn solo must come in with the release of several players in measure 91. This solo, marked *quasi-recitativo*, should be performed soloistically. For rehearsal purposes, it can be helpful to guide the English horn player through his/her solo measures. However, liberties can be taken regarding tempo and dynamics after the performer becomes familiar with the material. The player must pay attention to the *subito mezzo-forte* in measure 96, as it is the only prescribed dynamic marking in the segment. Exaggeration of dynamics can help to overcome the relatively narrow dynamic range of the English horn, which can be a hindrance to some players. The performers who enter in measure 99 tend to perform these measures too lightly. The conductor should call attention to the *tenuto* marking on the first eighth note indicating a little more weight right on the downbeat followed by the staccato sixteenth-notes. The horn soloist can accent his or her entrance in measure 101, before fading into the sound of the clarinets. The sparse orchestration featured in this section of the work helps with the dynamics desired, meaning the performers do not need to strain to play as softly as possible. The section beginning at 102 begins much the same way as before, with clarinets making way for solo English horn, followed by *staccato* passages in the woodwinds, this time with the brooding sound of the clarinet. After the horn soloist performs his/her accented fanfare figure a second time, the clarinet players must see a release from the conductor before the horn changes to concert G.

The volume of the pizzicato string bass must dictate the balance for the section beginning in measure 118. Despite writing the bass part in other voices, Alfred Reed wishes that, should no double bass player be available, the line be omitted.<sup>22</sup> Without the string bass, it can be easy to push this section too quickly forward. The section should slowly develop and swell naturally with the melodic line. Conducting this section in six can help prevent the group from gaining too much speed. Pay attention to bringing in the glockenspiel in measures 128 and 132, as well as the first horn in measure 133. Measure 149 should be taken as a large, subdivided three pattern to bring out the moving line in the string bass which will be the most important part in that measure, as its rhythm dictates the *ritardando*. The horn signals a return to the A section as the clarinets play material first played in measure 87. Clarinets should make a *crescendo* as they get lower and lower until the final note of the passage in measure 154. The English horn soloist returns in measure 155 with similar material as before. The final melodic gesture of this movement is in the horns which helps the modulation to D major for the final section. Because of the *ritardando* and *fermata*, the conductor can show these two notes to the performers before setting up the slower tempo for the final section.

#### **Section 4: Cathedral Chorus**

##### **Analysis**

The final section of *Russian Christmas Music*, "Cathedral Chorus," is the first large section of the work in a major key. It is outlined in detail in Table 5 in the

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<sup>22</sup> Alfred Reed, *Russian Christmas Music*, Score, ii.

Appendix. This movement synthesizes and alters themes seen in the other sections of the work, while introducing the fourth theme. Reed cleverly builds the work from an incredibly thin texture in measure 166 to a false climax in measure 197. Using an incredibly weak resolution, Reed allows the music to briefly disintegrate into a chorale in the clarinet choir. This chorale begins in B minor, the relative minor to D major, and modulates through several keys to return to D major. After this chorale, the work builds again in orchestration and intensity to the end. The ending features a pedal D with parallel chords and other interesting resolutions before outlining dominants and tonics in the final measures.

### **Conducting Considerations**

The primary challenge for the conductor in this section is pacing. It is the longest of the four sections and can easily become too loud early on. Careful management of the performers by not showing too large of gestures can help ensure that the orchestration is doing the work of driving to the next section. Right away trombones enter with a *crescendo* from *piano* to *fortissimo* which is excessive considering that only ten other players are playing *pianissimo* drones at the time. It would be wise to instruct the trombones to change their high dynamic on these to a more reasonable *mezzo forte*.

Observing the rhythm in the timpani part in the measures leading up to measure 185 should indicate a small *accelerando* to the conductor. This *accelerando* should begin somewhere around measure 182 so that the tempo change in measure 185 isn't abrupt. Similarly, a *rallentando* can be added to assist the transition into measure 188. Measure 198, however, should not slow down because doing so can lead to alignment



issues in the sixteenth-notes. The next section which can cause problems is measure 217, which cannot be too loud or explosive despite the entrance of fast-moving woodwinds and the takeover of the melody in the horns. Fortunately, the *accelerando* should keep the conductor's pattern small to help facilitate the move to measure 219. The final note of the work should be resonant. The percussionists will instinctively choke the suspended cymbal and gong but should be instructed not to stop the sound aggressively. Lengthening the final note in the wind parts leaves time for the percussionists to dampen their instruments more slowly, allowing the sound to resonate more.

### Conclusion

*Russian Christmas Music*, Alfred Reed's first work for the wind band, already shows many of the characteristics present in his later writing. His clever use of harmony and his incredible gift for orchestration are apparent in the beautiful melodies he presents and transforms throughout the work. With this piece, along with others written early in his life, Reed was cemented as a cornerstone composer of new and original music for band. Despite this, he later claimed that it was not his best work, saying, "I regard it strictly as a young man's piece."<sup>23</sup> His humility surrounding this work is to be admired but is understandable. Throughout his long career, people recognized him more for his earliest work rather than several of his later compositions. In *the Winds of Change*, Frank Battisti remarks of a survey of band directors from Iowa who regarded *Russian Christmas music* as the only work of Reed's worthy of being included

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<sup>23</sup> Jordan, *Alfred Reed: The Man Behind the Music*, 125.

in the standard repertoire.<sup>24</sup> Reed's comments may reflect the frustration of a composer wishing his more mature compositions received the same adulation as his first attempt composing for the medium.

This work presents no shortage of challenges for the conductor as each transition presents new and exciting problems. Many of Reed's markings, such as his tendency to write dynamics which are too loud to achieve good balance, can prove to be unhelpful to performers. There are also sections where several players have figures which want to accelerate while, simultaneously, others want to pull the tempo back. Deciding when to subdivide or meld long notes can be challenging, especially considering how many different performers are playing. This thick orchestration, including many undoubled parts, provides additional challenges, even for extremely large groups.

Researching this work is far from complete. An attempt to discover and recreate the original performance version of this work as well as the 1947 revision would be an undertaking. Investigating the link between the compositions of Alfred Reed and his teacher Vittorio Giannini provides plenty of room for research. Giannini wrote his *Symphony No. 3* for band in 1958, well after he had worked with Alfred Reed. Finding the influence of Giannini in Reed could be fascinating but determining if Reed ended up influencing Giannini's works for band could also be explored.

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<sup>24</sup> Battisti, *the Winds of Change*, 227. Whether the directors were only performing *Russian Christmas Music* or programming music of Reed's they didn't deem masterworks is unknown.

Undoubtedly, *Russian Christmas Music* has earned its position in the standard wind band repertoire. The work contains incredible versatility and thematic development, despite its truncated, eleven-day composition schedule. By viewing how the various themes wind and snake their way through the composition, one gets a masterclass in composition from a composer early in his career. For the conductor and performer, this monumental work provides challenge after challenge but diving through the depths of the composition reveal an incredibly mature piece of art.

## APPENDIX

Table 1: A full overview of the work

Table 2: Analytical flowchart of section one

Table 3: Analytical flowchart of section two

Table 4: Analytical flowchart of section three

Table 5: Analytical flowchart of section four

**Table 1** Russian Christmas Music whole work analysis

Measure	1		13		22		32		43		55		63		76	
Large Sections	31						54									
Sub-sections	3	9	9	4	6	23					31					
Theme		A	X	A	None	B	B	B	B	C	C	B	C			
Key	D pd	Gm			G	G- (Parallel)	C	D- (v)	G	Modulating	Gm					
Roman numerals	V	i			I	i	IV	v	I	Modulating	i					

Measure	86			98			118			126			134			142			155		
Large Sections	80																				
Sub-sections	32						37									11					
Theme		B'	C'		B'	C'		C							B'						
Key		Gm			Dm		Gm		Gm										D		
Roman numerals		i			v		i		i becomes iv of new key										I		

Measure	166	185	188	200			219		236
Large Sections	84								
Sub-sections	19	15		19			31		
Theme	D	D, A'		B''			B''		D'
Key	D			Bm (relative minor)	Modulating	D	D		
Roman numerals	I			vi	Modulating	I	I		



**Table 2** Flowchart for "Children's Carol" (continued)

Measure	22										32
Macro/sections											
↓	4				6						
					2	4					
Micro/phrases	2		2		2	4					
Time Signature				4			3			4	2
				4			4			4	2
Tempo/Style Suggestions	Tempo primo - eighth=c.72										Con moto
Theme	A				None						
Important Harmony				I	iii→ii→V →I	I→bvii <sup>9-8</sup> →I					i
Harmony description	Reed returns to natural minor chord progressions over a pedal on the 5th scale degree. This time, however, the resolution is on G major						Reed concludes the section with a weak I→vii→I resolution, though he transitions through passing tones and suspensions to provide some tension.				Next section begins in the parallel minor
Orchestration	Drone in low brass and woodwinds, Clarinet choir				Brass		Woodwinds, horn				Trombone

**Table 3** Flowchart for “Antiphonal Chant”

[illegible]



**Table 3** Flowchart for “Antiphonal Chant” (continued)

[illegible]

**Table 4** Flowchart for "Village Song"

[illegible]

**Table 4** Flowchart for “Village Song” (continued)

[illegible]





**Table 5** Flowchart for “Cathedral Chorus” (continued)

[illegible]



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